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ABSTRACT

This report compares student perceptions of the block schedule with those of the traditional seven periods in high school. It describes a public school that voted to implement a modified three-block schedule containing two traditional periods. The participants in the study were 200 high-school students, all of whom were switched from a traditional 7-period format to a block schedule. Data collected from surveys were used to compare students' perceptions on various areas related to block-scheduling practices. The surveys consisted of 12 Likert-scaled questions focusing on attitudes and perceptions. The results indicate that the students did not significantly favor the use of block scheduling. Even though after the first year students showed an increase in perceptions that favored block scheduling, rising from 17 percent to 36 percent, the majority (59 percent) still preferred the traditional schedule. Students were initially concerned about being able to make up work, but this concern decreased after the first year. Student did record a rise in interest in several factors of the classes but not enough to outweigh preference for traditional scheduling. It is recommended that school administrators should carefully study implementation and evaluation policies when initiating block scheduling. (RJM)

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Student's Perceptions of Block Scheduling Practices in a Selected Arkansas High School

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Student's Perceptions of Block Scheduling Practices in a Selected Arkansas High School

Throughout the current decade, numerous high schools have been actively engaged in restructuring the school day. The need to increase student achievement levels, and the need to provide students with more active learning opportunities in order to meet the mandated increases in graduation requirements have caused schools to examine different scheduling patterns. (Smith & McNelis, 1995). The vehicle and key component being investigated is that of the variable time. The variable time block is a longer uninterrupted instructional time block usually lasting for 90-minutes.

Theoretically, block scheduling impacts the quality/focus of instruction and improves student achievement. This longer uninterrupted instructional time provides for fewer classes and transitions per day, and the completion of more course credits during a school year. Teachers prepare and conduct three courses instead of five or six courses daily, and are responsible for teaching and evaluating 75-80 students as opposed to 150 students each day. In addition, transitions between classes and lunch times are generally longer in the block schedule than in the traditional schedule (Edwards, 1993; Kruse & Kruse, 1995).

Block scheduling plays an active role in changing curriculum and instructional approaches as teachers adapt to maintain student interest and attention over longer periods of time. Improvements include the integration of various teaching methods, instructional flexibility, and creativity. The restructured schedule also asserts an improved school climate in which teachers and students are more relaxed due to improved relations and a more moderately paced day (Day, 1995; Gerking, 1995; Jones, 1995).

Procedure and Participants

Southside Public Schools wanted to examine a change in their scheduling format. After calling schools which had made scheduling changes and examining a number of formats (alternate block, 4/4 block & modified 4x4), the faculty voted in favor of a modified 3-block with two traditional periods. This plan did not conflict with athletics, drill, band or choir. It also reduced the number of classes students/teachers are scheduled for at the same time.

The participants in this study were 200 high school students from the Southside Public School System. Data collected from surveys were used to compare student's perceptions on various areas related to block scheduling practices. These students were all switching from a traditional seven period format to a block schedule. The surveys each consisted of 12 Likert scaled questions focusing on attitudes and perceptions. This study reports percentage results.

Results and Discussion

Student's Perceptions

	1997-98	1998-99
1. I like the block schedule	17%	45%
2. Classes are interesting, not boring	2%	36%
3. Teachers provide opportunities for students to work together	12%	45%
4. It is difficult to do makeup work	29%	9%
5. Discipline of students has improved	5%	9%

6. A variety of teaching/learning methods are used by teachers	4%	23%
7. I am getting better grades than last year	19%	14%
8. There is adequate time for homework	12%	41%
9. All of class time is used in a meaningful way	10%	23%
10. I am receiving more individual attention from teachers	5%	18%
11. There are fewer class disruptions	4%	14%
12. The block schedule should be continued	20%	41%

Students in ten areas showed an increase interest in block scheduling. However a majority of students in all twelve areas favored the more traditional seven period schedule. Their perception when first introduced to block scheduling was low. When asked, "I like block scheduling" only 17% strongly agreed that they did and only 2% thought classes would be interesting. After a year of taking classes in a block schedule format the students interest in classes increased to 36%. Students were initially concerned about making up work (29%), however, after a year, their concern decreased to 9%. Students initially felt that block scheduling would result in less variety of teaching/learning methods (4%), after one year (23%) felt that block scheduling offered greater variety of teaching/learning/methods. When asked, "All class time will be used in a meaningful way" initially 10% and after one year almost one fourth (23%) of the students thought class time was used in a meaningful way. Originally students thought they would get very little individual attention(5%), yet after a year the

percentage increase to 18%. Overall students think (59%) that block scheduling should not be continued.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare student perceptions of the block schedule with the traditional seven periods in high school. It is clear from this study that these perceptions do not significantly favor the use of block scheduling. There was an increase in perceptions for all responses except make up work, and better grades. After the first year, students showed an increase in perceptions that favored block scheduling, however the majority felt that the traditional schedule was better. Also, connected with this question there was a strong increase in the question that students like the block schedule. In addition, the questions; classes are interesting students work together, and there is time for homework, had increases in percentages. In this survey 18% of the students agreed that they were actually receiving more individual attention. The administration should take a close look at implementation and evaluation policies. The most important issue is that the majority of students in this survey don't wish to continue with the block schedule.

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